



Greater Warren County Drug Task Force

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Honorable Mark E. Souder
U.S. House of Representatives
Chairman
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice
Drug Policy and Human Resources

Dear Representative Souder:

The Greater Warren County Drug Task Force's experience with clandestine methamphetamine labs began in July 2000. After purchasing a small amount of methamphetamine, we obtained a search warrant and raided the almost abandoned farm house at the end of a 1,000 foot gravel driveway. Only by the grace of God did this first endeavor turn out to be successful, since we had no training or protective gear to minimize harm to all of us who drove down the long lane to the house.

In that residence we found over 50 automatic weapons, most ready to fire at a moment's notice, detonation cord, and a host of toxic chemicals, meth waste, and a small amount of methamphetamine. During the investigation we became aware of child endangerment and abuse, and domestic violence, two issues that are often present at these clandestine laboratories.

On this first lab we arrested four people, and removed two children from their parent's custody by notifying our Children's Services department in Warren County. All of the adults present were long time methamphetamine users, and showed the signs of anorexia, little or no personal hygiene, paranoia, and a drug induced stupor that seems commonplace with methamphetamine abuse.

In almost 38 years of law enforcement, which included 32 years with the Cincinnati Police Department before coming to Warren County, I believe that methamphetamine is the most addictive drug on the planet. When abusers are willing to drink their own urine and smoke their own pus out of self-induced scratches in order to obtain the drug, it has a lethal attraction like no other substance of abuse I have encountered in my career.

Since January 2004, the Greater Warren County Drug Task Force has dismantled 23 clandestine laboratories, while making 31 felony meth arrests during the same period. The interesting part is that we have almost doubled the labs in 2005(15) so far compared to 2004(8). Similar figures involving arrests show fifteen (15) in 2004, and already sixteen (16) in 2005 with over 4 months left in the year.

Two of the labs in early 2005 were discovered when an explosion occurred in a populated area of Franklin, Ohio, during the cooking process. Fortunately, no human beings were killed or seriously injured, but the family dog died due to the explosion and resulting fire. These labs have been found in motor vehicles (mobile), abandoned barns and homes, garages, remote park areas, and in typical residential neighborhoods filled with parents and children, with cooks that have no regard for their safety.

In 2004, a large discharge of anhydrous ammonia at the fertilizer storage area in Pleasant Plain, Ohio, required law enforcement and fire personnel to evacuate the entire town early one morning. The release of this dangerous farm chemical was the direct result of methamphetamine manufacturers attempting to steal the product from large tanks containing thousands of gallons of anhydrous ammonia. Only luck, and good weather conditions prevented many residents from becoming ill from inhaling the fumes.

Since the first methamphetamine clandestine laboratory discovery in July 2000, our Drug Task Force has been able to obtain training for an entire team of eight (8) specialists. These law enforcement officers, and one chemist from the Miami Valley Crime Lab, respond to methamphetamine production scenes and dump sites, wearing all necessary protective clothing and processing the site with the full support of the Hazardous Material Unit, and the local fire department. All procedures are followed, and DEA is contacted for a "clean up number".

Since three of my detectives are Site Safety certified, they are given a "clean up number" that is then given to the contracted toxic chemical waste company who responds to the scene to remove and process the toxins. This alleviates the need for DEA to respond to the scene, but allows for them to pay for the clean up, which can be thousands of dollars depending on the extent of the lab. Without this very important federal money used to clean up these labs, many local governmental entities would be unable to pay for the clean up.

The Greater Warren County Drug Task Force has made addressing meth abuse and production a top priority. Extensive training to law enforcement agencies, fire and EMS units, probation and parole officers, children's services workers, local businesses and the general citizenry have been conducted with considerable success. In addition to personal appearances, a 15 minute methamphetamine awareness video has been produced by our office to be distributed across the county.

In May 2005, through state forfeitures designated to drug education and awareness and a generous donation by the Proctor and Gamble Company, we purchased a 26 foot clandestine laboratory trailer. This trailer's use is twofold; it provides public and law enforcement education that includes the meth video, and our meth display kit, and is also the response vehicle for all meth labs reported in our county.

The trailer is totally equipped with all protective gear and supplies needed to process a clandestine lab. Therefore, officers can respond directly to the lab site, knowing that all of their equipment needed will be on the trailer. Our current equipment (breathing apparatus) is in need of an upgrade to bring it to the top of standards.

Clandestine Methamphetamine vs. Crystal Methamphetamine

The clandestine methamphetamine labs and their light brown powder have addicted many people in our county and surrounding areas. In addition to the drug's devastating addiction possibilities, the possibility of fire and explosion, or the release of toxic fumes into the air make it a large concern of law enforcement and fire personnel. This form is produced in small "mom and pop" labs across our region. Generally only enough meth is made to satisfy the producers and a few friends who have gathered the precursors to produce the dangerous substance. When it is sold, it will bring a street price of about \$100 a gram, with it being unusual to find large caches of this form of methamphetamine.

Crystal methamphetamine or "ice" represents a new and growing problem of meth abuse, addiction, and trafficking. Our recent purchase of 6 ounces of crystal meth in Warren County for over \$14,000 resulted in the drug being tested as 92% pure by our lab. With this drug having purity levels 5-10 times that of clandestine manufactured meth; it is easy to see that overdose deaths may be commonplace in the future if this form of the drug is not addressed also. In addition, huge profits will be generated with the drug being diluted several times to produce street values far higher than the clandestine form of meth.

Crystal methamphetamine is being manufactured primarily in Mexico, and enters our country through the Arizona and Texas borders. On one seizure, the Greater Warren County Drug Task Force confiscated 11 pounds of crystal

methamphetamine, representing over \$500,000 in street value drugs that came directly from Mexico through the Arizona border.

Very recent national trends indicate that the tightening of pseudoephedrine product sales by states has generated a considerable increase in the distribution of crystal methamphetamine. This is documented by recent reports that meth seizures at the Mexican borders has risen from 14 pounds in 1992, to 3,820 pounds in 2003. The Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) estimates that methamphetamine abuse is currently evenly divided between the two forms of this addictive drug in our home state.

State and Local Law Enforcement Needs

Byrne Memorial/JAG Grants

The financial pinch felt by local governments, and the State of Ohio, have made the reduction in Byrne Memorial/JAG Grant funding for local drug task forces to be potentially devastating in fighting the drug war.

Ohio drug task force grant monies have been cut in half in most instances for 2006, with a much greater cut in a few more. Currently, there is no funding slated for drug task forces for calendar year 2007. This change will effectively cripple many drug task forces in 2006, and will likely eliminate others in 2007, if funding is not restored to its 2005 level.

The clandestine methamphetamine problem, and the increased abuse of crystal meth, will put an even greater strain on drug task forces in Ohio. I strongly urge that these grants under Byrne Memorial/JAG be restored to their past levels to insure a continued pursuit of high level drug traffickers by law enforcement.

Federal Forfeiture Revisions

In these times of reduced revenue for governmental entities, the consideration of the expanded use of federal forfeitures is very important. Currently, federal forfeiture monies can be used for a variety of things to combat the drug war. However, salaries of drug task force personnel are prohibited, except new employees for the first year.

This puts many drug task forces in the position of having substantial federal forfeiture monies accrued from participating in joint federal-local drug investigations, but being unable to maintain their current personnel strength due to lack of enough state and local funding. This could put drug task forces in the position of having state of the art equipment to address the drug problems, but not the funding to provide an investigator for its operation.

My understanding is that U.S. Attorney General Gonzalez can expand the use of federal forfeiture funds to include that of the salaries of drug task force personnel that have been there longer than a year. This change may very well also be the difference between certain drug task forces surviving at their full strength or not at all. Since this change apparently does not require legislation, I would hope that it could be considered as one of the most expedient ways of allowing new funding for drug task forces. This change would not require more taxes or governmental funding, only a small change in the current policies involving asset forfeiture.

ONDCP-HIDTA

Our region has recently been designated part of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) in Ohio. This Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) funded program has been very effective in our short tenure of promoting cooperation between local, state, and federal agencies. HIDTA also provides excellent training

opportunities, investigative resources, and the ability to provide investigative deconfliction nationwide that foremost protects law enforcement officer's lives, while safeguarding major criminal cases.

I feel the continued full funding of this program is crucial if we are to continue to combat the drug problem in the United States effectively. The influx of crystal methamphetamine just adds another drug requiring total law enforcement cooperation involving an international substance of abuse.

Clandestine Lab Clean Up

We need the clean up program to continue to be well funded as we battle these clandestine methamphetamine laboratories. This money is crucial to many jurisdictions who otherwise would not be able to afford the clean up of these toxic chemicals generated in these working labs.

DEA Clan Lab Entry Team Training

Many jurisdictions, including our task force, have trained clandestine lab response teams, but most have not received the proper training on how to make a forced entry into these labs, when necessary. The Drug Enforcement Administration has the personnel to provide that training either at Quantico, Virginia, or within our own state. Entering methamphetamine labs is an extremely dangerous event, especially if the cooking process is ongoing. This makes training for these forced entry situations paramount to safeguard the officer, and innocent civilians that may be in the house or surrounding area.

Increased emphasis on this training, while funding drug task force personnel to attend, will help relieve the heavy burden on the DEA, while protecting state and local agents who find it necessary to make forced entries into methamphetamine laboratories.

Conclusion

Law enforcement continues to try and address the issues surrounding clandestine methamphetamine production in their jurisdictions. The efforts on clandestine meth require extensive training and equipment for law enforcement, and good intelligence on those who are producing this addictive substance. Continued education efforts are also vital, and are the key to identifying those responsible for these crimes. Continuing with current clean up programs for clandestine meth, along with forced entry training, would be welcomed.

The introduction of crystal methamphetamine has already started in Ohio, and will likely continue to grow, especially as new legislation will likely take place concerning the sale of pseudoephedrine products. Crystal meth is likely to be more potent, with bigger profit margins, and more overdose deaths. Crystal meth will need to be combated in much the same ways as law enforcement currently deals with cocaine and marijuana, also with a Mexico nexus.

Now more than ever, while Homeland Security needs make for strained drug enforcement budgeting, increased funding is needed for drug task forces. Money for personnel, overtime, equipment, and good training is paramount. The need is to restore grant monies to 2005 levels, and relax the federal forfeiture policies to allow us to pay for salaries of drug task force agents that may need to be laid off if relief is not forthcoming.

In addition, the best way I see to promote federal-local drug law enforcement cooperation producing excellent cases, is to continue the funding to ONDCP for the HIDTA's. HIDTA can be the glue that keeps the federal-local entities together working toward a common goal of reducing the influx of illegal substances into the United States, while arresting and prosecuting those responsible for its distribution.

Sincerely,
Commander John J. Burke
Warren County Drug Task Force